

# IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

## Tandy's lap-top model overlooked by users

With the recent hype about portable, "transportable" — less than 50 pounds — and IBM-PC compatible lap-top computers, the Tandy 102 tends to get overlooked. It was introduced several years ago as the Radio Shack Model 100, and then upgraded and renamed the Tandy 102. It was the first, true lap-top personal computer with an adequate display.

The machine has been a wild success for Tandy Corp. Tens of thousands have been sold — more than any other easy-to-carry personal computer. It's exceptionally small at 8 inches by 12 inches by 1.5 inches, a lightweight three pounds, and very inexpensive — \$499. Most other lap-top PCs are significantly larger, heavier, and three or four times the price.

Further, unlike other computers that use small CRT screens or liquid crystal displays with itsy-bitsy characters, this one has LCD characters that are larger and easier to read than the others.

However, it's not for everyone. The Tandy 102 also has some significant drawbacks:

- ✓ It's not IBM PC-compatible. This is the kicker that prevents the machine from being a runaway hit and competing head-on with most other portable machines in the marketplace.

Nonetheless, it does operate very well for a few applications. But it cannot run the thousands of programs that are available for PC-compatible machines.

- ✓ It has a smaller-than-normal screen. Compared with most PCs with 80 characters across and 24 lines visible on the computer screen, this one has only 40 characters across and 8 lines down. As mentioned, however, the oversize characters make it easy to read.

- ✓ The machine has limited internal memory with a maximum 32 kilobytes and no built-in disk drive for off-line storage. When you fill up the available space, you must either dump the contents of memory to another computer, or erase unused files to create more space.

In my testing of the machine, I found that the transfer of files to another computer is easily done after you know how, but not easy to learn and do the first time. You can either connect the Tandy 102 to a PC using a special cable, or transmit your files over telephone lines using the internal modem in the Tandy 102.

In both cases, in order for the file transfer to be successful, you have to learn how to plug in special cables, use the specific communications software recommended for the purpose, and type in the appropriate commands precisely. You

probably need the assistance of an expert the first time.

On the positive side, however, because of its small size, it can go places that many PC-compatible computers can't, and you can set up procedures to automatically transfer the contents of memory to another PC periodically. This would allow the Tandy 102 to serve as an efficient data-entry device for people who travel or who need a low-cost computer at home.

It easily fits in a briefcase. Four AA batteries last for 16 hours, and a separate rechargeable battery keeps the memory intact for 30 days or more. You can change the AA batteries without affecting the data stored in memory.

If you frequently travel, the machine can be used to easily compose memos or letters, keep client information, record orders, and even do simple spreadsheet calculations with a version of Multiplan available separately. The data can be transmitted to your office computer over regular telephone lines using the built-in modem and automatic dialer.

This combination of features makes the machine perfect for salespeople, journalists and executives who may wish to carry a low-cost computer with them in a briefcase. Just one drawback — you must be a good typist. Otherwise it will be quicker to take written notes and you don't have to incur the expense of a computer.



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